Notes on the Original Greek Text of the New Testament

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New in this version:

Minor corrections; notes on

Mt 7:1–2, 1 Thess 1:1.

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present, in concise form, some basic information about the New Testament compiled for my own use. This paper is intended to be usable by readers who do not know Greek as well as those who are studying, or have studied, New Testament Greek. I would appreciate feedback from anyone with suggestions or corrections.[1]

1.1 Author's qualifications

I am not a professional Biblical scholar. My original training is in linguistics, with a strong emphasis on historical linguistics (Ph.D., Yale, 1982). I know Latin and Greek well and Hebrew moderately well.[2]

[1] Earlier versions of this document were titled *Notes on the Greek New Testament.*

[2] I want to thank Dr. Bryan Whitfield of Mercer University, who *is* a professional biblical scholar, for numerous corrections and helpful advice. The responsibility for remaining errors, and for opinions expressed here, remains my own, of course.

For those who are wondering about my personal religious commitment, I am a Christian of the type often described as "evangelical," i.e., conservative but not closed-minded (see for instance Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity,* Inter-Varsity Press, 1995). I view Scripture as authoritative.

2 The New Testament as Holy Scripture

2.1 Validity of historical study

To some people, the very idea of studying the Biblical text historically contradicts the claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

I see no such contradiction. I think it important that the Bible actually bears the visible marks of the process by which it was transmitted to us. Otherwise we would not be sure it had actually been transmitted that way. If the New Testament had arrived in the form of one perfectly pristine manuscript, with no scribal errors or uncertain readings, we would suspect that it was a modern forgery.

2.2 Formation of the canon

The New Testament was not written as a single book; its various books were written in different places and assembled by the early church. The list of books considered scriptural is called the *canon.* The NT canon was in final form by 400 A.D. Long before that, there was a central core of authoritative books, including the four Gospels and the letters of Paul; other less important books took longer to become fully accepted. The books that took the longest to decide on were Hebrews and II Peter (because of uncertain authorship), Revelation (because its Greek is very different from the other writings of John), and short books with little doctrinal content, such as Jude.

Several kinds of books did not make it in:

- Books that are solidly orthodox, but reflect the church at a later stage of development. Examples include the *Didachē* (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) and the Letters of Clement.
- Books that did not appear to be historically and doctrinally reliable, although part of their contents may well be true. A number of written accounts of the lives of Jesus and the Apostles were circulated in ancient times, but on the whole, the church did not consider them

sufficiently accurate to be used as Scripture. An example is the (Coptic) Gospel of Thomas.

- Books that were not accepted by Christians throughout the whole Roman Empire, East and West.
- Books that were obviously contaminated with Gnosticism or other religions. The early church was plagued with these; that's one reason the church insisted on identifiable, apostolic-era authors.

The church's main criterion was consistency with books that were known to be accurate. Jesus had a distinctive style, and attempts by heretics to put words into his mouth were generally quite unconvincing. The flamboyant style of false gospels contrasts with the matter-of-fact detail of the genuine ones.

2.3 Protestant vs. Catholic vs. Orthodox

Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians use exactly the same New Testament, although there are differences of interpretation (for example, does *adelphoi* in Mt 12:46 mean 'brothers' or 'kinsmen'?).[3]

The "apocrypha" or deuterocanonical books that are accepted by Catholics but not Protestants are all in the Old Testament.

2.4 Biblical quackery

Since the second century, people have been claiming that, in addition to the recorded teachings of Jesus, there was additional "secret knowledge" that Jesus passed down by word of mouth to a select few. This secret knowledge generally turned out to be doctrines picked up from Gnosticism or Greek mystery religions. Numerous ancient books exist that give some account of Jesus mixed with the teachings of some other religion.

To combat this problem, the early church insisted on two things:

[3] The Orthodox do not use the book of Revelation in their lectionary because it requires so much context to interpret correctly. However, they accept it as fully canonical, and substantial amounts of their liturgy are taken from it.

1. Apostolic succession of bishops. The apostles ordained the first generation of bishops, who ordained the second generation, etc., so that if there were any secret knowledge, the bishops would have heard about it.

2. Apostolicity of New Testament books. That is, the teachings in all canonical books must be traceable to the Apostles. For example, the Gospel of Mark, who was not an Apostle, was accepted because Mark worked closely with the Apostle Peter.

We can therefore be quite sure that if Jesus had actually passed along any secrets, we would have heard about them. He didn't. Unfortunately, people are still making such claims, and often claiming that some ancient Gnostic document is an exciting new discovery.

Another form of quackery consists of claims about numerical patterns or hidden codes in the Bible. (An example is Del Washburn's "theomatics.") The Greeks did use letters as numerals, so any Greek word does have a numerical value, although most words do not form correctly written numerals.

If there really were a recognizable numerical pattern in the Greek text, it would provide a very simple way to verify that a manuscript has been copied correctly. There isn't.

2.5 Lower vs. higher criticism

This paper is mostly about *textual criticism* or *lower criticism,* the study of ancient manuscripts to establish the original form of the written text. Another type of scholarship, *higher criticism,* is the study of how the original written text came to be; that is, how the author composed it and whether it was based on earlier sources.

Some of the results of higher criticism are hard to dispute. For instance, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke share a substantial amount of material, and they may well be based on a common source of information (called "Q" for "Quelle," German for "source"). The book of Isaiah does consist of two or three major sections that may well have been written on separate occasions. The early chapters of Genesis do contain passages in different styles that

appear to come from shorter documents that circulated before Genesis was assembled in its present form.

The problem with higher criticism is that, in general, its results are not testable. The theories of textual critics are always testable, at least in principle, because more manuscripts may be discovered. The speculations of higher critics, however, may be beyond the reach of any possible archeological discovery. C. S. Lewis has argued convincingly that higher criticism gives false results when applied to modern literature whose history is known.[4]

Even more importantly, higher criticism sometimes starts with the assumption that the basic claims of Christianity are false – that the Bible is not divinely inspired, that miracles never happened, that the early Christians were foolish and gullible, and so on. Then a type of circular reasoning takes place. A doctrine that the critics wish to reject is classified, on theological grounds, as a "late development." Biblical passages containing that doctrine are then labeled as later additions. Finally the critics announce that the doctrine has been shown to be a late development *because* it occurs only in late additions to the text – and the public easily gets the impression that there is some archeology or manuscript work to back up such a "discovery."

This is why, for example, I cannot accept the speculations of the "Jesus Seminar" of R. W. Funk and others, who are busy picking apart the "original" sayings of Jesus from those that were "added later." I am not alone; the great textual scholar B. M. Metzger has disparaged the "Jesus Seminar" as "not exactly a work of scholarship."[5]

3 How the New Testament got to us

None of the original manuscripts of the New Testament presently exist. All we have to work from are copies, and the copies differ from each other in

[4]C. S. Lewis, "Fern-seed and Elephants," in his *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity,* London: Collins, 1975, pp. 104–125. Also published as "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" in C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections,* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967, pp. 152–166.

[5]In a lecture at the University of Georgia, 1998.

various minor ways.

3.1 Types of manuscripts

As soon as the NT books were written, early Christians copied them for distribution. Indeed, Christians were among the first people to use bound books (codices) instead of scrolls.

Handwritten books are called *manuscripts,* and the Greek manuscripts of the NT fall into several categories. Each manuscript is identified by a standard abbreviation or number.

The oldest are written on *papyrus* and survive, in general, only in fragments; papyrus does not keep very well, and outside Egypt few papyrus manuscripts have survived at all. The surviving New Testament papyri are numbered $\mathbf{p}^1$, $\mathbf{p}^2$, etc. Many papyri probably date from the period when the individual books of the NT were circulated separately.

Later manuscripts are written on vellum (thin leather), which holds up very well over the centuries. Earlier vellum manuscripts are written in *uncial* letters (basically all capitals); later ones are written in *minuscule* (cursive) writing.

One of the most important uncials, Codex Sinaiticus (c. 350 A.D.), is also the oldest surviving book containing the entire New Testament. It is usually designated **א**. Other uncial manuscripts are identified with capital Latin or Greek letters (**A**, **B**, **C**, **Θ**, etc.) or numbers beginning with 0, such as 046, 092, 0246, etc.

The minuscules all date from the ninth century or later and are designated with numbers such as 1, 13, 28, 1253, etc. Two interesting families (groups) of them are called $\boldsymbol{f^1}$ and $\boldsymbol{f^{13}}$.

3.2 Why manuscripts differ

Manuscripts differ because scribes make mistakes – pure and simple. Types of scribal mistakes include:

- Skipping a word or a line;

- Inserting a word as a result of misreading – either picking it up from a nearby verse, or remembering the wording of a similar verse elsewhere;
- Mistaking comments (in margins) for corrections, and incorporating them into the text;
- Transposing adjacent words or passages;
- Changing a word by misreading it or by mixing it up with another word that is pronounced similarly.

In addition, particularly at early stages of transmission, scribes sometimes made deliberate corrections or improvements to the text, believing that they were correcting a mistake made by an earlier scribe.

When manuscripts differ, the task of the Biblical scholar is to figure out which reading is original. *This cannot be done by simply counting manuscripts,* since a manuscript does not gain historical value simply because somebody made a lot of copies of it at a late date. Scholars have to study the age and distribution of the manuscripts. Three manuscripts located in widely separate parts of the world in 500 A.D. carry a lot more weight than twenty manuscripts made in a single monastery in the 1200s.

Besides the manuscript evidence, the scholar must use internal evidence according to two opposing principles:

- *The text must make sense* – a manuscript is incorrect if it says something uninterpretable or obviously contrary to the author's intent; but
- *Lectio difficilior* ("More difficult reading") – the version of the text that is harder to understand is more likely to be correct, because scribes tend to simplify things and make them understandable.

There is not as much tension between these two principles as it would appear, because the second criterion is used only to distinguish readings that have already passed the first hurdle. In fact, it is a special case of an even more general principle:

- *The change must be possible* – if some manuscripts say A and others say B, the original reading is the one that could have more easily changed into the other one.

This last principle is especially useful when more than two variant readings are involved.

3.3 Text types

Every manuscript has its own personality. Almost every manuscript differs in some small details from the others. The vast majority of these differences are inconsequential (alternative spellings of the same word, slight rearrangements of word order that do not affect meaning). Even the tiniest differences make it possible to trace the "pedigree" of a manuscript and classify manuscripts into types.

The Greek manuscripts fall into four basic groups:

- **Byzantine or "majority" text (= Syrian text, Koinē text).** This is represented by the largest number of manuscripts (including those on which the King James Version is based) but they are *later* manuscripts (after the papyrus period). It tends to be the smoothest-reading and longest version of the text. It may well have resulted when a group of scribes compared and combined the other three (an event called the "Byzantine recension" thought to have happened in perhaps the third century).

- **"Alexandrian" text** (also called Egyptian or Neutral). This comprises two important manuscripts (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) and many other early manuscripts, including numerous papyri. It tends to be more concise (shorter).

- **"Western" text.** This comprises some early manuscripts and many quotations by Church Fathers. Minor alterations of sentence structure are frequent. It is uncommon in later manuscripts. Vaganay (1991) argues that Western is actually not a well-defined category, but the manuscripts classified as Western include some of the oldest and most reliable sources.

Table 1: **The most important NT manuscripts.**

Dates and classification are mainly from Metzger 1992
and are in some cases controversial.

Byzantine (Majority) text type

A (c. 450) (Codex Alexandrinus) (in Gospels only)
W (c. 400) (Washington Codex) (mixed w. other types)
Most manuscripts after about 700
Textus receptus ("accepted text" of many early printed editions)

Alexandrian (Egyptian) text type

$\mathbf{p}^{46}$ (c. 200) (Chester Beatty papyrus 2) and many other papyri
ℵ (c. 350) (Codex Sinaiticus)
A (c. 450) (Codex Alexandrinus) (except Gospels)
B (c. 350) (Codex Vaticanus)

Western text type (not a valid category according to Vaganay 1991)

D (c. 500) (Codex Claromontanus) (Epistles only)
Old Latin translations (before 400)
Early Greek and Latin Church Fathers

Caesarean text type (= mixed Alexandrian and Western?)

Θ (c. 850) (Codex Koridethi) (Mark only)
f^{1}, f^{13} (two families of later medieval manuscripts)
Some Church Fathers

Other text types

$\mathbf{p}^{45}$ (c. 225) (Chester Beatty papyrus 1)
(Caesarean in Gospels; Alexandrian in Acts)
D (c. 500) (Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis) (Gospels and Acts)
A text-type all its own. Has unusually long version of Acts.
Note that there is another **D** above.
Vulgate ('popular') Latin translation by Jerome (400 A.D.)
Combination of Alexandrian with other text types.

- **"Caesarean" text.** This is quoted by Church Fathers around Alexandria, and is generally similar to the Western text but not widely distributed.

Until the late 1800s it was taken for granted that the Byzantine text-type was the real thing; in fact, little was known about the other kinds of manuscripts. Current (20th-century) translations tend to prefer the Alexandrian text. There is, however, a growing number of scholars who think the Byzantine text is best after all, especially when a few of the latest manuscripts are excluded.

3.4 Printed editions of the Greek NT

Printing was invented around 1450, and the Latin Vulgate Bible was the very first book to be printed, but the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament did not appear until 1516. It was prepared by Desiderius Erasmus, who started the project while visiting Cambridge University (a place that he described as primitive, with bad food). Erasmus had only a few Greek manuscripts, all of them from the Byzantine ("Majority Text") tradition. He had no manuscript of the last few verses of Revelation at all and had to translate them back from Latin.

Despite its deficiencies, Erasmus' edition went through numerous editions and became known as the Textus Receptus (Latin for "accepted text"). It was still being used by scholars as late as 1900 and to this day is still used in church services in Greece. The Textus Receptus was the basis of the King James Version.

Modern critical editions, based on the comparative study of all available manuscripts, were first published by Tischendorf (1872), Tregelles (1879), Westcott and Hort (1881), Weiss (1900), and von Soden (1913).[6]

In 1901, Eberhard Nestle hit upon the idea of publishing a digest or combination of Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Weiss, citing the manuscript evidence from all available sources. "Nestle" editions have been the standard tools of biblical scholars ever since. The 27th and latest edition, published in 1993, was edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland. Nestle

[6] These are no longer generally available and are therefore not listed in the bibliography.

editions cite a large number of manuscript variants, including relatively unimportant ones, but they give the manuscript evidence in a very abbreviated form, with extensive use of special symbols.

In 1966 the United Bible Societies (UBS) published an edition of the Greek NT intended to serve the same purpose, though presented in a different style. UBS editions cite fewer manuscript variations but discuss them in greater detail. They use no special symbols and are therefore much easier to read. Editions are available that include dictionaries and maps, so that the UBS Greek NT is a self-contained tool. The 4th UBS edition (1993) has the same text as Nestle 27, but the typesetting has taken a step down and I am still using UBS 3. Metzger (1971) published a detailed commentary on the textual decisions made by the UBS editors.

3.5 Recent developments

3.5.1 Greater confidence in Byzantine text type?

In recent years a number of scholars have argued that the Byzantine text type is more reliable than previously supposed. The arguments are diverse.[7]

The mainstream of 20th century scholarship places greatest confidence in the Alexandrian text type, which is supported by the oldest manuscripts (especially papyri). Although the majority of medieval manuscripts are Byzantine, none of the very oldest manuscripts are of that type.

It is argued that this is a historical accident. The Byzantine type seems to have originated in Syria, where the very oldest manuscripts simply didn't survive. The Alexandrian type comes from Egypt, where the dry climate preserved pieces of papyrus from the earliest days.

Indeed, it is claimed that because papyrus was cheap, the manuscripts written on it may have been people's quick notes for personal study, rather

[7]See for example Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism,* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984; G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Greek New Testament of Today and the Textus Receptus," in H. Anderson and W. Barclay, eds., *The New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1965 (cited by Sturz); Maurice A. Robinson, *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Atlanta: Original Word Publishers, 1991).

than authoritative texts.

The Alexandrian text tends to have the shortest readings, and the Byzantine tends to have the longest. This is usually interpreted as meaning that the Byzantine texts are the result of careful editing at a later date. But a number of critics argue that scribes are at least as likely to shorten passages as to lengthen them. Further, the language of the Alexandrian text type is closer to classical Greek and the Byzantine shows more Hebrew influence, which should indicate greater authenticity.

On all these grounds, a number of scholars prefer the Byzantine text. If they are right, then the Church, for most of its history, has had better texts than 20th-century critics have supposed. Indeed, some of its advocates go on to claim that the Byzantine text is not merely good but *best,* divinely protected, and some even claim this protection extends to the Textus Receptus (made from a few rather poor Byzantine mss.) and the King James Version.

An obvious difficulty with that theory is that if the King James Version is God's own text, then the Latin Vulgate is not, because it has an Alexandrian-Western type of text. But the Vulgate was *also* distributed over an extremely wide extent of space and time. So which text was God actually protecting?

A more moderate view is that the Byzantine text contains many readings that are likely to be authentic and should be evaluated on their merits, but is not the only reliable text type.

3.5.2 Earlier dating of papyri

The oldest papyrus whose date is uncontroversial is $\mathbf{p^{52}}$, a small fragment of John's Gospel dated c. 125 A.D. or slightly earlier.[8]

Recently, several scholars have argued that some extant papyri are considerably older than that. C. P. Thiede argues on the basis of physical evidence that $\mathbf{p^{64}}$, a tiny fragment of Matthew, dates from about A.D. 60.[9]

[8] Metzger 1992, pp. 38-39.

[9] *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 105 (1995) 18–20 (article in English); an entertaining account for the lay reader is Thiede 1996. A rebuttal by Klaus Wachtel, in German, appears in the same *Zeitschrift,* 107, 73–80.

Earlier, José O'Callaghan argued that a papyrus fragment found at Qumran is a fragment of Mark's Gospel and dates from about A.D. 50, but the identification is controversial.[10]

A crucial factor is the discovery of Greek papyri at Qumran, site of the Dead Sea Scrolls, abandoned A.D. 68. Whether or not any of these papyri contain parts of the NT, they serve as a basis of comparison for dating other papyri more accurately by type of handwriting and similar factors.

Meanwhile, in 1976, Anglican bishop John A. T. Robinson argued from internal evidence that practically the whole New Testament was written before A.D. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple). Since Robinson is very liberal on doctrinal matters, he clearly was not motivated by fundamentalism, and his arguments led to considerable debate.

If this redating becomes widely accepted, there will be somewhat less room for speculating about how the Gospels were altered to fit the Church's changing ideas about Jesus (as proposed, for example, in *The Myth of God Incarnate,* ed. by John Hick, London: SCM Press, 1977). There is already less scope for this kind of speculation today than there was a century ago, when it appeared that the Gospels were all put into final form in the middle of the second century.

4 Translating the New Testament

4.1 What Greek is like

The New Testament is written in Koinē (Common) Greek, the language of the Greek-speaking empire established by Alexander the Great. It is quite close to the Attic Greek of Plato and Aristotle, but it is simpler and lacks some distinctively Attic features.

Ancient Greek is a language that makes an unusually large number of distinctions. As in Latin, nouns and pronouns are marked for case, to indicate which is the subject and which is the object. As in most languages other than English, singular and plural 'you' are distinguished (thus KJV

[10] In favor of O'Callaghan's position, see Thiede 1996, pp. 32–34; against it, Metzger 1992, pp. 264–265.

singular ‘thou’ and plural ‘ye/you’). However, manuscripts often confuse ‘we’ and plural ‘you’, *hēmeis* and *humeis* respectively, because both were pronounced *imis* in postclassical times.

The verb system is especially elaborate. There are three kinds of past tense:

- *imperfect,* describing a past continuous or habitual activity, like the Latin imperfect but somewhat less common;
- *aorist,* or simple past, describing a past event that was instantaneous or whose duration does not matter;
- *perfect,* describing a completed past event whose persistent result is important.

The writers of the New Testament did not always use the whole system. The Greek of the Gospels is strongly influenced by Hebrew and Aramaic, even to the point of not distinguishing present from past tense. However, when subtle distinctions needed to be made, St. Paul and other writers could draw upon a large vocabulary and a firm grasp of Greek grammar.

Like English and unlike Latin, Greek has a word for ‘the’. However, the conditions for its use are not entirely the same as in English, and it would be a mistake to always translate it literally.

4.2 The King James Version

From 1611 until the mid-1900s, many American and British Christians knew of no Bible translation except the Authorized Version commissioned by King James I of England and issued in 1611. This translation has its staunch defenders as well as its critics.

In favor of the King James Version (KJV):

- It was, for its time, an excellent translation.
- It gave the whole English-speaking world a standard text, partly because the King of England required people to use it, and partly because no one thought they could produce a better translation for a long time afterward.

- It distinguishes singular *thou/thee* from plural *ye/you*, thus enabling you to tell whether every second-person pronoun or verb refers to one person or more than one.
- It follows the Hebrew and Greek sentence structure very closely and is a useful aid for people learning those languages.
- The KJV is not copyrighted in the United States and can therefore be printed very cheaply. (It is still copyrighted in Britain.)

Against it:

- Its language was old-fashioned and awkward even in 1611, since it stuck close to the wording of the 1384 translation by John Wyclif(fe) and several intervening translations. Parts of it are now very hard to understand.
- Some English words have changed meaning to the point that serious misunderstanding will result. For instance, in the KJV, *let* could mean 'hinder,' and *prevent* could mean 'precede.'
- It gives the false impression that the Bible is written in a special, obscure or pompous kind of language.
- Its New Testament is based on a manuscript of the Byzantine type; none of the benefits of modern archeological discovery are present.

During the period when only the KJV was in use, many people seem to have forgotten that it *was* a translation. Even today, there are people who argue that the KJV is the "word of God" and other translations aren't. If that is true, then the Word of God has never been revealed to people who do not speak English – a strange doctrine indeed.

The New King James Version (NKJV) is a minor revision of the KJV, making only the changes needed for accuracy in modern English. Among more mainstream translations, the RSV, NASB, and ESV all stick close to KJV wording whenever possible, to facilitate memorization of Scripture.

4.2.1 Italicized words in the King James Version

In the King James Version and a few others, words inserted by the translators are printed in italics (e.g., 'an *unknown* tongue,' 1 Cor 14:4).

Most of these insertions are required by English grammar (especially adding 'is' to translations of Hebrew verbless sentences). A few, like the one just cited, have doctrinal significance.

What is important is to realize that the italics in the KJV do not indicate emphasis – quite the opposite!

4.3 Modern translations

Most present-day Bible translations are reliable. Lewis (1991) gives an informative and fair evaluation of dozens of them. Bible publishing has become big business, and new translations come out every year or two. Some important distinctions to consider are following:

Doctrinal basis. Some translations (NIV, NASB) were made with a conscious desire to preserve important evangelical doctrines and present them clearly. In effect, the translation preserves not only the text, but also the evangelical tradition of how to interpret it.

Other translations are more neutral (e.g., RSV, NRSV, and the classic King James Version). The NEB and REB implement some unusual hypotheses about the structure of the Old Testament text; this, combined with their free-flowing literary style, has given them a perhaps undeserved reputation for liberalism.

Some Old Testament passages have acquired new meaning as a result of the NT; should the translation reflect this, or should it simply give a straight translation of the Hebrew? Likewise, when a quotation of the OT in the NT seems unclear or garbled, should the translators fix it up? Opinions differ. A great deal can be said for using the NT as an authority on the OT, simply because it is more ancient than most surviving OT manuscripts.

Another, more general issue is whether the translation should be clearer than the original. If a verse is unclear but evangelicals have arrived at an

understanding of it, should the translation preserve the unclearness of the original, or should it give the evangelical interpretation?

Roman Catholic translations use different names for some Old Testament books and include some deuterocanonical OT books (Maccabees, etc.), but in the NT, they do not have any doctrinal axe to grind (except perhaps rendering 'brothers' as 'kinsmen' in Matthew 12). Catholic editions of the RSV and TEV exist mainly because of church approval procedures, and they are (in the NT) word-for-word identical with Protestant editions.

Some translations *are* made in order to promote unusual doctrines; an example is the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation,* which makes some odd assumptions about Greek grammar.

Style and literary antecedents. The New Testament is written in simple, straightforward Greek, the ordinary language of the people to whom it was originally addressed. Translations should not sound pompous, awkward, or exotic.

The RSV uses *thee* and *thou* in prayers (for compatibility with Anglican church services) but not elsewhere. This is entirely unauthentic; the Greek does not use special pronouns for prayers, and neither do other translations.

Some translations (RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, NKJV) consciously preserve as much as they can of the wording of the King James Version, as a convenience for people who have memorized Scripture or are familiar with the traditional wording. KJV, in turn, has a strong tendency to preserve Hebrew and Greek sentence structure even when it is not natural English. Older Catholic translations (Douay, etc.) generally stick close to the wording and sentence structure of St. Jerome's Vulgate.

Other translations aim for good English at the expense of literalness; these include NIV, TEV, The Jerusalem Bible, NEB, and REB. This is what people generally want when reading literature that did not originate in their own language.

A special case is The Living Bible, which is billed as a paraphrase, not a translation, and should never be used to resolve doctrinal disputes.

Textual scholarship. Most "modern" translations are based on the Greek NT editions of Nestle and the United Bible Societies, which in turn reflect the critical study of hundreds of manuscripts, generally giving more weight to Alexandrian than to Byzantine texts.

The King James Version is based on a Byzantine manuscript, and the New King James Version (NKJV) continues to rely on the Byzantine ("majority text") group of manuscripts.

The New English Bible translators did extensive text-critical work before translating; they published their own edition of the Greek NT, whose contents are generally unsurprising, and in the OT, they made extensive rearrangements of verses in poetic material where they thought the order of the verses had been corrupted.

4.4 Are more translations needed?

My own feeling is that the proliferation of Bible translations since 1990 – many of which I haven't even mentioned by name – is not entirely a good thing, for several reasons:

1. The newest translations are not substantially better than earlier ones. When translations exist that are already very good, it is hard to justify making a completely new translation to compete with them. Instead, the best existing translations should be improved by making minor revisions.

2. Having too many translations encourages the practice of picking a translation because it favors your favorite ideas, not because of its accuracy.

3. Having too many translations also gives the general public the false impression that the Bible cannot be translated accurately, that the meaning of the original text is unclear and disputed.

4. Some translations are made because a publisher wants a share of the market, rather than because of any real need.

Still, one translation is not enough. I generally advise people to check several translations, and to trust only the points on which they agree.

The translation that I am currently using for my own study is the English Standard Version (ESV). This is a minor revision of the RSV on the basis of newer textual scholarship and a somewhat more conservative approach to textual matters — for example, the NT is considered authoritative as a source of information about the OT, and the Masoretic Text of the OT is translated without emendation whenever possible. The overall flavor of the ESV is similar to NIV except that the ESV sticks closer to the original Hebrew and Greek sentence structure and does not use “thee” and “thou” anywhere.

5 The inclusive-language issue

5.1 Why gender is a problem

The English language handles gender very differently than Greek, and the difference has increased during the twentieth century.

English is almost the only language in which people use the phrase “he or she,” and in which the pronoun “they” is completely neutral for gender. In most other languages, including Greek, masculine forms are used to refer to people of unknown gender and to mixed groups.

Further, in Greek, but not in English, words denoting human roles (disciple, teacher, carpenter, deacon) almost always indicate gender. Again, the masculine form is used for individuals of unknown or irrelevant gender, and in the plural, for mixed groups. This means that Greek can often use a masculine plural where English would use a pair of words.

Here are some examples of how Greek divides up the world differently than English:

English	Greek
brother	*adelphos*
sister	*adelphē*
brother or sister	*adelphos*
brothers	*adelphoi*
sisters	*adelphai*
brothers and sisters	*adelphoi*
he	*autos*
she	*autē*
he or she	*autos*
they (masc.)	*autoi*
they (all fem.)	*autai*
they (mixed)	*autoi*
man, person	*anthrōpos*
men, people	*anthrōpoi*
man (emph. maleness)	*anēr* (pl. *andres*)
woman	*gunē* (pl. *gunaikes*)

Thus, many Greek sentences are hard to translate into English. Whenever the Greek says *adelphos* and the context is not perfectly clear, should the translator say "brother" or "brother and/or sister"?

One traditional solution is to use masculine forms and inform the reader that gender is different in Greek than in English. However, as soon as you have to explain the original language to the reader, you're no longer *translating,* i.e., conveying the same message in English. That is the origin of the inclusive-language problem.

5.2 Controversies over "inclusive" translations

Several recent Bible translations have tried to overcome the masculine bias that comes from translating Greek too literally into English. They are motivated by one or both of two goals:

- To *convey* the meaning of the original text to the reader;

- To *change* the teaching of the Bible to make it more consistent with modern feminism.

The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version (Oxford University Press, 1995) is an example of the second type. It explicitly *alters* the meaning of the text, replacing 'Father' with 'Father-Mother' to suit feminist theology rather than linguistic accuracy. Since the only legitimate goal of a translation is to *tell people what the text says,* this translation is useless for serious study.

Two translations of the first type are the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) and the *Today's New International Version* (TNIV). Of the two, in my opinion the NRSV is distinctly more accurate.[11]

Here are some examples of how the NRSV, TNIV,[12] and older translations handle specific verses.

- **Luke 17:3**

  RSV and NIV: If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

  NRSV: If another disciple [*footnote:* your brother] sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.

  TNIV: If any brother or sister sins against you, rebuke the offender; and if they repent, forgive them.

  Comment: RSV and NIV preserve the conciseness, but not the inclusiveness, of the original. NRSV is an awkward paraphrase. TNIV uses singular "they" and "them," which sound natural to Southerners but puzzle speakers of other dialects of English.

- **John 6:44**

  RSV: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

[11]There have been criticisms of the accuracy of the TNIV in places where gender is not the issue. Not having seen the printed edition of the TNIV, I am withholding comment.

[12]My TNIV examples are from online reviews published on www.christianitytoday.com and elsewhere; as this is written the complete TNIV is not yet available.

NIV: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

NRSV: No one can come to me unless drawn to the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

TNIV: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

Comment: NRSV does a good job here. By using singular "them," TNIV is open to misunderstanding; it sounds as if salvation is conferred on groups rather than individuals.

- **John 11:25**

  RSV: He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

  NIV: He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.

  NRSV: Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

  Comment: The Greek here is barely masculine, since the latter two occurrences of "he" are actually implicit in gender-neutral verbs. RSV uses slightly old-fashioned English, with a subjunctive verb ("though he die"). NIV modernizes the English but loses the rhetorical effect of the word order. NRSV preserves the rhetorical word order but changes to plural, which I don't think is misleading in this context.

- **2 Thess. 3:10**

  RSV: If any one will not work, let him not eat.

  NIV: If a man will not work, he shall not eat.

  NRSV: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

  TNIV: (not available)

  Comment: NRSV gets this one exactly right. There are no masculine forms in the Greek. See p. 37. Where the NIV got "man" is not at all clear; the NIV mistranslation could easily lead to an erroneous doctrine that it's all right for women to be idle.

- **Hebrews 2:6, quoting Psalm 8**

  NIV: What is man that you are mindful of him,

the son of man that you care for him?

NRSV: What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
or mortals, that you care for them?

Comment: Although it conveys the most important part of the meaning, the NRSV fumbles by concealing the special phrase "son of man" (see p. 29).

5.3 My opinion on inclusive language

Translating Greek inclusive masculine forms is a genuine problem. When no neutral form is available in English, what's a translator to do? Saying "he or she" is cumbersome. Using a plural instead of a singular clears up the gender problem but can distort doctrines. The Southern U.S. practice of using "they" and "them" as singular forms is not understood elsewhere.

It is probably best for the serious Bible student to use a translation that follows the gender of the original, realizing that masculine forms in Greek are generally inclusive. Otherwise, precision and conciseness are loss.

For serious study I like the approach taken by the ESV, which translates relatively literally, but adds footnotes to supply gender information that does not come through in the translation (e.g., that *adelphoi* 'brothers' includes sisters).

For the beginning Bible student, inclusive translations are helpful, but they inevitably lose precision in some ways while gaining it in others. If you want an inclusive translation, I much prefer the NRSV to the published advance samples of the TNIV.

This implies that we have a market for two kinds of translations, a less literal type that conveys the meaning to the beginning reader through paraphrase, and a more literal type for use by serious students who know some of the quirks of the original language.

Finally, as a cautionary note, remember that there is not only feminist bias, but also anti-feminist bias. I've encountered people who objected to unquestionably accurate inclusive renderings because they wanted to make more of a distinction between men and women than the Bible does.

6 Pronunciation of New Testament Greek

Do we know how the Greek language was pronounced in ancient times? Surprisingly, the answer is yes. Sources of information include comparative historical linguistics; ancient transcriptions of Greek words into the alphabets of other languages and vice versa; the rhythm of poetry; spelling errors made by native speakers; and surprisingly detailed studies of phonetics carried out by Greek philosophers and grammarians.

The authority on ancient Greek pronunciation is Allen (1987); his results are substantially the same as those of Sturtevant (1940), whose book is perhaps more accessible to beginners.

This section of the paper is full of technical detail and is intended for those who have studied some Greek.

6.1 The Koinē situation

Greek pronunciation has always been variable. Unlike Latin, Greek was never controlled by the educated elite of a single city; there has always been a variety of dialects. In New Testament times, a "shared" or "mixed" (*koinē*) dialect was rapidly displacing the ancient dialects across the Mediterranean world, but the pronunciation of Koinē Greek varied from place to place and speaker to speaker, particularly since so many of the speakers were non-native. For example, a native speaker of Latin, learning Greek, might distinguish **ο** and **ω** quite fastidiously while a native speaker of some other language might pronounce them exactly alike.

6.2 Recommendations

The ordinary student of Greek does not need to know all the reconstructible phonetic details of the language. He or she merely needs to pronounce words as nearly as possible using the sounds of English or other familiar languages and to preserve, in the pronunciation, the distinctions made in the spelling. I recommend pronouncing New Testament Greek as follows:

Pronounce **β δ ζ κ λ μ ν ξ π ρ σ τ ψ** like their English equivalents, *b d z k l m n ks p r s t ps*. Take care not to pronounce **σ** as *z* between vowels as is commonly done with English *s*.

Pronounce **γ** as *ng* before **γ κ χ**; as *g* elsewhere.

Pronounce **φ θ χ** like *f*, *th* in *thin*, and *ch* in German *Loch* respectively.

Pronounce the rough breathing mark (ʽ) as *h*. The smooth breathing mark (ʼ) is silent.

Pronounce ***α*** like *a* in *father* or *about*; ***αι*** like *ai* in *aisle*; ***αυ*** like *ow* in *how*.

Pronounce ***ϵ*** like *e* in *pet*; ***η*** as a prolonged Spanish *e* or a prolonged version of ***ϵ***. The main difference between ***ϵ*** and ***η*** is that the latter lasts at least twice as long.

Pronounce ***ϵι*** like *i* in *machine* (or like *a* in *plate* if you also study Classical Greek and want to pronounce both kinds of Greek alike). Do not pronounce ***ϵι*** as "eye," a value it never had in Greek.

Pronounce ***ϵυ*** as a rapid "eh-oo" as in Spanish *Eugenio*.

Pronounce ***ι*** like *i* in *it* or *machine*.

Pronounce Greek ***o*** like a short, clipped Spanish *o*, or like German *o* in *Gott*; ***ω*** as a prolonged version of the same sound. Do not pronounce ***o*** like *o* in *off*.

Pronounce ***oυ*** like *u* in *rule*; ***oι*** like *oi* in *coil*.

Pronounce ***υ*** like French *u* or German *ü* (i.e., a sound between *u* and *i*).

Pronounce ***υι*** like *ui* in French *puissant*, i.e., roughly as "wee."

Do not pronounce the iota subscript.

Stress the syllable that has the accent mark (´ ˆ `). In some books ˆ is written ˜.

6.3 Details

In Modern Greek, ***β δ γ*** have become fricatives, like English *v*, *th* in *with*, and Spanish *g* in the middle of a word such as *hogar*. There were scattered signs of this change in Koinē times, but it definitely had not caught on widely.

In Classical Greek, ***π τ κ*** were unaspirated consonants (as in French), and ***ϕ θ χ*** were the same sounds accompanied by a puff of air, as in English. They took on their Modern Greek values, described above, in the first and second centuries after Christ.

In Classical Greek, ***ζ*** was pronounced *zd* or possibly *dz*, but it had become plain *z* by New Testament times.

In Modern Greek, ***αι*** is pronounced *e*, a change that was already beginning to show up in show up in Koinē Greek, though the older pronunciation was definitely still in use in the first century.

The Modern Greek pronunciations of ***αυ ϵυ*** as *af ef* date from the Middle Ages.

In Modern Greek, ***ϵι η ι υ υι*** have fallen together and are all pronounced *i*. This is clearly not the ancient system, and it leads to great confusion of spelling (sometimes evident in Byzantine manuscripts of the New Testament).

Nor do $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}$ $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ $\boldsymbol{\epsilon\iota}$ $\boldsymbol{o}$ $\boldsymbol{\omega}$ correspond directly to Latin *ĕ ē ēi ŏ ō* as classical scholars often suppose. The difference is that in Latin, the long vowels *ē ō* are higher (closer) than the short vowels *ĕ ŏ*, but Classical Greek is the other way around: $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ and $\boldsymbol{\omega}$ are low vowels, like *e o* in *pet* and *nought*, but are prolonged, whereas the higher vowels $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}$ $\boldsymbol{o}$ are short, like a brief, clipped Spanish *e* and *o*.

In Koinē Greek, the vowel-height distinctions had been lost, and the significant distinctions were in vowel length. Thus Koinē $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ $\boldsymbol{\omega}$ were very much like Spanish *e o*, prolonged to twice the duration of $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}$ and $\boldsymbol{o}$.

In Greek, $\boldsymbol{\epsilon\iota}$ was never a diphthong; it was the long version of the high vowel $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}$, and in Koinē times was shifting to *i*.

Before classical times, $\boldsymbol{\upsilon}$ sounded like Latin or Spanish *u*. In classical and Koinē Greek it was more like German *ü*, a sound that not all Koinē speakers could make; occasional confusions were evident early, but $\boldsymbol{\upsilon}$ did not become *i* uniformly until roughly 1000 A.D..

In Classical Greek, the accentual system was musical, rather like that of Swedish, and the symbols ´ ˆ ` represented, respectively, a high pitch, a high pitch followed by a low pitch on the same (long) vowel, and a weaker high pitch at the end of a word.

It is likely that non-native speakers of Koinē Greek never mastered this system, and soon after New Testament times, Greek had clearly switched to a stress accent like that of English (or more precisely like that of Spanish), where the accented syllable was simply spoken more loudly than the others.

6.4 In praise of Erasmus' folly

Reconstructed ancient pronunciation is sometimes called "Erasmian" because the first serious attempt to reconstruct the pronunciation of ancient Greek was published by Desiderius Erasmus in 1528. Until his time, Greek scholars in Europe used Modern Greek pronunciation, and indeed, Erasmus himself did not adopt the pronunciation that he reconstructed.

Erasmus did a good though not perfect job. He correctly recovered the classical values of $\boldsymbol{\beta}$, $\boldsymbol{\eta}$, $\boldsymbol{\alpha\iota}$, and $\boldsymbol{\alpha\upsilon}$, but he mistakenly pronounced $\boldsymbol{\epsilon\iota}$ like English *eye* and $\boldsymbol{o\iota}$ like *we* or *wa* (French *m<u>oi</u>*, Allen 1987, p. 143).

A much more corrupted "Erasmian" pronunciation arose later on because of shifts in English pronunciation. For example, Erasmus' early English followers said that one should pronounce $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ like *ea* in *meat*. That was fine in their time, when this was the same sound as in *great*, but soon *meat* came to be pronounced like *meet* and the pronunciation of $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ came out wrong. The entire English vowel system was restructured in the 1500s and 1600s, and with the change, the pronunciation of Greek and Latin in England became very unauthentic until it was reformed again at the end of the 1800s.

Apart from those quibbles, "Erasmian" pronunciation is correct pronunciation,

supported by a huge body of linguistic evidence.

7 Specific Greek words and phrases

Immorality in English means, of course, whatever is not moral. Some overly fastidious translators, however, have used it to render Greek *porneia,* which refers specifically to sexual immorality (as in 1 Cor 5:1).

Love in the NT represents two Greek words: *philia* 'friendship, emotional love' (of spouse, family, etc.), and *agapē* 'unselfish love' (the love that binds the Christian community together). Two more Greek words, *erōs* 'romantic or sexual love' and *storgē* 'affection from kinship or long familiarity,' do not occur in the NT, which subsumes their meanings under *philia.*

Son of man *(huios tou anthrōpou)* is a Hebrew or Aramaic phrase rendered literally into Greek. It is usually taken to mean "this human being," a humble way of referring to oneself (compare the way Howard Cosell called himself "this reporter"). Generally, in Hebrew, "son of X" means "person whose most distinctive quality is X" (e.g., "son of the country" = "patriot"). In some places it seems to mean "human being" (Heb. 2:6, Psalm 8).

Moule (1977), however, argues that as a title of Jesus, this phrase is an allusion to Daniel 7 and was understood as specifically referring to the Messiah.

The truth is surely that it is both. Like many other phrases, it has a broad meaning and also a special meaning which carries full force in some contexts and is in the background in others.

8 Specific textual problems

8.1 Gospels

Mt 5:22 *Everyone who is angry at his brother [without cause] will be liable to judgment. . .*

"Without cause" is one Greek adverb (*eikēi*), absent from the Alexandrian text-type (which is generally considered the most reliable), but present in the others. In Codex Sinaiticus it was inserted by a scribe as a correction. Numerous Church Fathers quote the passage without that word.

The question is, did *eikēi* get added or removed? Most present-day biblical scholars think it was added by scribes who felt the verse did not quite make sense without it. This, however, it not certain; it is also possible that *eikēi* is original and was accidentally omitted from one early but widely circulated manuscript.

Mt 6:13b *For thine are the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.*

These words are in Byzantine but not Alexandrian manuscripts, nor are they in the Latin Vulgate. If they are not authentic, they probably originated as a liturgical response that was spoken by the congregation at the end of the Lord's Prayer. They closely resemble a line of King David's prayer in 1 Chr 29:11.

Mt 7:1–2 *In order not to be judged, do not judge; for with the judgment with which you judge, you will be judged, and with the measurement with which you measure, you will be measured.*

The verbs '(you) judge' and '(you) measure' here are present, not aorist forms; they refer to continuing practices. Also, the second verse supplies much-needed context for the first one. In the light of the second verse, we are not absolutely forbidden to judge (e.g., to recognize sin) – merely required to do so fairly and mercifully.

Mt 12:46 *His (=Jesus') mother and his brothers stood outside seeking to talk to him.*

Roman Catholics maintain that Mary remained a virgin all her life and thus that Jesus did not have brothers. The Greek word here, *adelphoi* (singular *adelphos*), is certainly the normal word for 'brothers' but may have meant 'kinsmen' here. It was rendered 'brethren' in Catholic RSV but then the original RSV, with 'brothers,' was approved for use by Catholics.

Mt 27:9–10 *Then will be fulfilled what was said through Jeremiah the prophet, who says, "Then he took the thirty pieces of silver... and gave them for the potter's field."*

Some commentaries say this is an obvious mistake, since the quotation comes from Zechariah 11:12–13.

Commenting on this verse around 400 A.D., St. Augustine notes that some manuscripts omit the prophet's name altogether – so perhaps 'Jeremiah' was put in by a sadly mistaken scribe.

Actually, the writer seems to be paraphrasing not only Zechariah but also Jeremiah 32:6–9. I wonder if the writer is quoting some later commentary on the prophets or some prophecy outside the Old Testament canon.

Mk 1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [son of God].*

Some of the Church Fathers omit 'son of God' here, as does the original handwriting of Codex Sinaiticus (in which 'son of God' is added as a scribal correction).

Mk 13:33 *Look, be alert, [and pray,] for you do not know when is the time.*

Codex Vaticanus, Codex Bezae, and some early Latin and Coptic translations omit 'and pray.' I think 'and pray' is original here, but many scholars think it is a scribe's mistake, anticipating the wording of Mark 14:38.

Mk 16:9–on *He who believes and is baptized will be saved;* passage about

poisons and snake handlers.

This is absent from some Alexandrian manuscripts; present in Byzantine and Western manuscripts, and in other witnesses, including Wulfila's translation into Gothic c. 400 A.D. Many medieval manuscripts include it in brackets or with notes about its uncertain status. Internally, it is problematic, containing a number of words not otherwise used by Mark (Metzger 1971, p. 125). It is also somewhat unusual doctrinally, placing an emphasis on baptism that is otherwise absent.

Lk 2:14 *Peace, good will to men* or *Peace to men of good will* or *Peace to the people of God's good pleasure.*

The Greek raises problems of both text and translation. The text is either *en anthrōpois eudokias* "among people of good will" or *en anthrōpois eudokia* "among people, good will." The oldest Alexandrian and Western manuscripts have the first reading, as does the Vulgate; Byzantine manuscripts and the KJV have the second.

Assuming "people of good will" is correct, what does it mean? It turns out to mean "the people with whom [God] is well pleased," or "God's chosen people," echoing a Hebrew phrase used in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Metzger 1971, p. 133).

Lk 11:1–4 A slightly shorter version of the Lord's Prayer (cf. Mt 6). As you might expect, the two passages have greatly influenced each other; in general, scribes copying Luke's version would have Matthew's version in mind and would tend to reproduce its wording.

Lk 22:19b–20 *This is my body which is given on your behalf; do this in memory of me. And likewise [he took] the cup after dinner, saying, This cup [is] the New Testament in my blood shed on your behalf.*

The words 'he took' and 'is' are not in the original.

A number of manuscripts and early translations scramble the order of verses 17–20 in various ways and omit various portions of the passage. Metzger (1971, p. 176) attributes this to an early Christian custom of

concealing the ritual of the Lord's Supper from non-Christians (to keep them from ridiculing it or disrupting services); thus, the details might be omitted from a copy made for outsiders.

Jn 1:5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

'Overcome,' not 'understand' (as NIV), unless the NIV translators are following some linguistic evidence with which I am not familiar. This verb, *katalambanō*, means 'surround and overcome.'

KJV rendered it as 'comprehend,' which meant 'surround, embrace, and capture' in the English of the time.

Jn 7:53–8:11 Story of woman taken in adultery (called in Latin the *pericopē de adulterā*): *Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.*

This passage is absent from Alexandrian manuscripts but present in Byzantine. A few early manuscripts include it in brackets or place it elsewhere (at the end of John, or in Luke). Its internal content looks authentic; there is nothing askew about the words or ideas.

8.2 Acts

The book of Acts includes more textual variants than any other part of the NT. However, the variants are entirely matters of elegant wording or clarification – they do not involve doctrine. There has been some speculation that St. Luke issued more than one edition of this book – that is, he allowed people to copy his rough draft and then issues a more elegantly worded version later.

Ac 19:2 *Did you receive the Holy Spirit when/after you believed?*

The translation of this verse figures prominently in controversies between charismatics and non-charismatics: do we receive the Spirit *when* we receive Christ, or later?

In the Greek, receiving follows believing, but there is no indication of whether any appreciable time elapses between them.

8.3 Epistles of Paul

Rom 8:28 *We know that for those who love God,*
all things work together for good. . .

At least one early papyrus and two important early manuscripts (Codices Alexandrinus and Vaticanus) say *God works all things together for good.*

1 Cor 11:24 *This is my body, [broken / given] on your behalf.*

Alexandrian manuscripts and several Church Fathers omit the bracketed word; Byzantine manuscripts, early translations, and other Fathers say 'broken'; and a few early translations say 'given' or 'handed over' (compare Luke 22).

1 Cor 14:4 *He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.*

KJV adds the word 'unknown' before 'tongue.' It is not in the original.

1 Cor 15:51 *We shall not [all] sleep, but we shall all be changed.*

A number of manuscripts and early translations say *we shall not sleep, and we shall not all be changed,* or even, *we shall therefore sleep, but we shall not all be changed.* (Here 'not' and 'therefore' are *ou* and *oun*, respectively, in Greek, and *de* can be translated either 'and' or 'but'.)

Because these variant manuscripts do not agree on the word order or exact wording, scholars are confident that they reflect scribal errors and that the familiar wording here (omitting the first 'all') is the original one.

2 Cor 5:21 *He (God) made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.*

KJV wording is misleading: "for us who knew no sin." It is definitely he, not us, who knew no sin!

Eph 1:1 *. . . to the saints who are at Ephesus and/also faithful in Jesus Christ. . .*

The most important Alexandrian manuscripts, **p[46]**, **ℵ**, and **B**, omit *at Ephesus*; in **ℵ** and **B** these words are added as a correction.

This fact, together with the absence of personal greetings in the letter, leads most scholars to believe this epistle was actually written to be circulated or distributed to several churches. One early writer, Marcion,[13] identifies it as the (otherwise unknown) epistle to the Laodiceans mentioned in Col. 4:16. (An apocryphal epistle was also known as the epistle to the Laodiceans.)

Eph 3:9 *and to reveal to everyone what is the function of the mystery which had been concealed from eternity. . .*

"To everyone" is missing from **ℵ**, **A**, and a number of other manuscripts. It was inserted into **ℵ** as a correction and is present in **B**, **C**, **D**, and numerous other manuscripts, including the Byzantine tradition.

"Function" is my translation of Greek *oikonomia* "working, management, purpose" (the source of the English word *economy*).

KJV's "fellowship" is due to an apparent scribal error in the Textus Receptus, which has *koinōnia* in place of *oikonomia*, breaking with the rest of the Byzantine tradition.

Col 2:21 *[20] If you have died with Christ to the principles of this world, why is it that, like those living in this world, you are subject to rules, [21] "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," [22] which are all doomed to perish in use?*

The verse division tempts people to take verse 21 out of context. Verse divisions were not in the original text.

1 Thess 1:1 *Paul and [Silas / Silvanus] and Timothy. . .*

Silas and *Silvanus* are apparently the same Latin name (like *Bob* and

[13]Founder of a short-lived sect that mixed Christianity with Gnosticism and other odd ideas.

Robert). The form that appears here is *Silvanus* (in Greek, *Silouanos*) but some translators change it to *Silas* to match the Book of Acts.

1 Thess 2:7 *We could have been a burden (on you) as apostles of Christ, but we became gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her children.*

In place of *egenethēmēn ēpioi* 'we became gentle,' the best Alexandrian manuscripts have *egenethēmēn nēpioi* 'infants.' So do the Latin Vulgate and some of the Church Fathers.

It's hard to tell which reading is original.[14] Early manuscripts did not leave space between words, and the scribe could just as easily have written two N's in place of one or one in place of two.

The internal evidence, in my opinion, supports 'gentle.' *Ēpioi* 'gentle' is a rare word and *nēpioi* 'infants' is a common word. Paul uses lots of rare words, so the appearance of *ēpioi* here is not implausible. Further, scribes tend to change rare words into common ones; a scribe who did not know the word *ēpioi* would be likely to transcribe it as *nēpioi.* Finally, 'gentle' makes more sense here than 'infants.'

But the case is not closed. Precisely because 'gentle' makes more sense, it may be some learned scribe's alteration of 'infants' rather than the other way around. 'Infants' does make some sense here; it just doesn't connect to the next clause very well.

If 'gentle' is right, we have a case where the Byzantine text is right and the Alexandrian text is wrong, the opposite of what is usually expected.

1 Thess 4:3–6 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: for you to keep yourselves away from sexual immorality; for each of you to know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in passion of strong desire like the Gentiles who do not know God; not to go beyond the limits and exploit your brother (or sister) in this matter.*

Translators disagree as to how to render *skeuos ktasthai,* literally "obtain or

[14]Printed editions of the Greek NT vacillate; UBS2 had 'gentle' but UBS3 and UBS4 have 'infants.'

gain control of a vessel."

Skeuos originally meant "vessel" or "dish" but became a very generalized word for "thing" or "instrument." In this verse it probably refers to a part of the body.

Some translate *skeuos* as "wife" (i.e., "know how to take a wife for yourself in holiness and honor") by analogy to 1 Pt 3:7, which refers to the woman as "the weaker vessel." But it is by no means clear that in that verse, or anywhere else, *skeuos* actually means "woman" or "wife."

1 Thess 5:22 *Abstain from <u>every form</u> of evil.*

Or "every appearance of evil" (as in KJV), meaning "evil under any of its forms or appearances."

"Avoid all appearance of evil" (i.e., do not let people think you're sinning) is a good rule to live by, but it is not what this particular verse means.

2 Thess 3:10 *If there is someone unwilling to work, <u>that person</u> shall not eat.*

NIV uses "he," leading some to conclude that only men are forbidden to be idle. The Greek has no pronoun; "he/she shall not eat" is one word.

8.4 General Epistles

These are also called the *catholic epistles*; 'catholic' simply means 'worldwide' (addressed to the entire Church).

Heb 12:1 *surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*

"Witness" here is *martys* "one who testifies" (not "one who watches").

1 Pt 3:18 *Christ <u>suffered</u> once on account of sins, a righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous, in order to lead <u>you</u> to God...*

A number of manuscripts have 'died' instead of 'suffered' (with various rearrangements of the word order) and 'us' (*hēmas*) instead of 'you' (*humas*). (Both of the latter were pronounced *imas* in early Christian times.)

Jas 3:2 *In many things we are all offensive.*

KJV 'we offend all' means 'we all offend' but is often misunderstood.

1 Jn 5:7 *For there are three bearing witness [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and the three are unanimous. And there are three bearing witness on earth,] the spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are unanimous.*

The bracketed passage is known as the *Comma Johanneum* (Latin for 'phrase of John') and is found only in a handful of Greek manuscripts, all dating from after 1500. It is in later manuscripts of the Vulgate.

The Comma Johanneum appears to have originated in a 4th-century Latin Bible commentary, the *Liber apologeticus.* From there, someone mistook it for an actual quotation of a Bible verse, and it found its way into some (eventually all) Latin manuscripts of the NT.

The few instances of this passage in Greek are thought to be back-translations from the Latin. Erasmus thought one of them was forged by someone playing a trick on him, and he may well have been right.

The disputed Greek passage shows a peculiarly Latin sentence structure; a native speaker of Greek would have said "the Father and the Word and the Holy Spirit."

Jude 22 *And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire. . .* (NRSV).

A substantial number of manuscripts and the Vulgate have *elenchete* 'refute, correct' rather than *eleate* 'have mercy on.'

The second underlined word here is *diakrinomenous* 'judging, making a decision,' and, ending in *-ous*, has to refer to the people who are the

recipients of the mercy. Perhaps a good translation would be, "Have mercy on those who are on the brink of a decision."

The Byzantine manuscript tradition has *diakrinomenoi*, the same word except that it indicates that the subject is doing the deciding: "Making a careful distinction, have mercy on some; save others by snatching them out of the fire..."

A number of manuscripts rearrange these verses in other ways (see Metzger 1971, p. 727–728).

KJV 'making a difference' means 'making a distinction.'

8.5 Revelation

This book is also called the Apocalypse (Greek *apokalupsis* = 'revelation').

Rev 1:5 *To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by means of his blood...*

A few manuscripts have *lousanti* 'washed' instead of *lusanti* 'freed' (aorist participle, dative singular); thus the KJV. A couple of them even have *kalesanti* 'called'.

Rev 22:14–21 *Blessed are... Amen.*

These verses were missing from Erasmus' Greek manuscript, so in order to complete the first printed edition of the Greek NT, he translated them back into Greek from Latin. He translated accurately, but in some details of wording he didn't quite match any existing Greek manuscript.

9 What about the Old Testament?

At this point the student of the Greek New Testament may be wondering whether the Hebrew Old Testament would repay study in the same ways. The answer is that Hebrew biblical scholarship is a rather different endeavor. The best reason for learning Hebrew is to learn the Hebrew way

of expressing ideas; it is very different from English and Greek, but the most old-fashioned-sounding passages of the King James Version preserve it.

Unfortunately, studying Hebrew does not shed light on difficult Biblical passages the same way the study of Greek does. There are several reasons for this.

First, Ancient Hebrew is not nearly as well-known a language as Greek. There is almost nothing written in it except the Scriptures (indeed, until recent archeological discoveries, there was nothing at all). Although the Jews kept up Hebrew as a literary language throughout the Middle Ages and revived it as the living language of modern Israel, the language changed appreciably during this period. Ancient words were given modern meanings, and even the meanings of the verb tenses changed radically, although the verb forms remained almost the same.

So there are a substantial number of words and passages in the Old Testament whose meanings are uncertain, or are passed down to us only by a single tradition with no independent confirmation. Fortunately, it is now possible to adduce evidence from related languages to help solve these puzzles. See James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament,* 2nd ed., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987. Barr's theology is sometimes controversial, but his linguistics is sound.

Second, the Hebrew scholar does not have the kind of manuscript evidence available to the Greek scholar.[15] There is basically only one Hebrew manuscript tradition, that of the Masoretes (Jewish scribes), who would make a very accurate copy of a manuscript and then reverently destroy the worn-out original rather than letting it remain in an undignified state. The oldest Masoretic manuscript is the Codex Leningradensis, dating from A.D. 1008, and it agrees very closely with much later manuscripts.

However, we know very little about the transmission of the Hebrew Scriptures before 1008. Substantial passages of the Old Testament occur in the Dead Sea Scrolls (A.D. 68) and agree well with the Masoretic text, but little else is available in Hebrew.

What we *do* have, paradoxically, is a set of good translations of the Old

[15] See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Testament into other, better-known, ancient languages. The most important of these are the Septuagint (Greek, c. 250 B.C.) and the Vulgate (Latin, 400 A.D.). These do not agree perfectly with the Masoretic text; further, when the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament, what is quoted is almost always the Septuagint.

The root of the problem is almost certainly the gradual way in which the Old Testament was put together. The New Testament came into being when people sat down, wrote books, and immediately distributed copies of them. Only a few parts of the Old Testament (such as the later prophecies and books like Ecclesiastes) appear to have originated that way.

Most of the Old Testament was assembled over a very long period of time. Obviously, Adam didn't write Genesis 1; who did? A tradition says that Moses wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, but the Bible does not actually claim this; when Jesus refers to those books as "Moses" He may mean only that Moses is the principal character in them. They certainly quote older material, such as the Song of Deborah. The text of Genesis may well have been written in the time of Moses, but it incorporated material that was already circulating, and it seems to have been edited further until perhaps as late as 500 A.D.Similarly, books like Psalms and Proverbs are obviously compilations made over a long period.

The fact that the Old Testament developed gradually does not mean it is not divinely inspired. On the contrary, the whole theme of the Old Testament is the Israelites' gradual realization that God is more than a tribal fire-and-thunder deity. If their experience of learning about God did not leave its marks on the Old Testament – if the whole book looked as if it had been written by a single author under nearly modern conditions – that would cast doubt, not reassurance, on its authenticity.

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